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ABSTRACT

The controversial nature of the knowledge base of educational administration is discussed in this paper. Included are a definition of professionalism, a discussion of how to build and develop a knowledge base, and a review of the obstacles to knowledge base development. Elements of a consensual knowledge base include theory, practice, and other combinations. A recommendation is made to build a knowledge base from expert practice, or grounded theory. A conclusion is that the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education's new unit rule is useful for educational administrators in defining the knowledge base and justifying instructional practices. A 74-item bibliography is included. (LMI)

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THE KNOWLEDGE BASE IN EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION

Did NCATE Open a Pandora's Box?

by

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THE KNOWLEDGE BASE IN EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION:

Did NCATE Open a Pandora's Box*

We learned it early in science. Sometimes, if you try to see a dim star, you can see it better if you look off to the side, rather than directly at it. If you want to see a faint movement, don't look straight at the spot, but look out of the corner of your eye and perhaps you will see it better. It is difficult to see a dim star if it is near a bright star. Perhaps stargazing should be our metaphor.

Is there a knowledge base for education administration? What <u>is</u> it? Who has seen it? Who <u>has</u> it? Perhaps, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, only a few tired but distinguished scholars grovel through the shadows to restore the luster to the tablets. If there is a knowledge base, it's pretty dim. Perhaps like our dim star, the best way to see it is to look obliquely; maybe we'll catch a passing glimpse or just a twinkle.

Daresh and Playko (1989) pondered the knowledge base and its relationship to mentoring. They concluded that maybe we couldn't use mentors in education administration, for they don't really have anything substantive to show to their proteges and protegees. "The research base on administration is not clear enough to guide mentoring relationships" (p. 90). "When there is little evidence of what good adminstrators ought to do, a handicap exists for those who might guide their colleague's practices" (p. 90).

C. M. Achilles, Professor, Education Administration, University of North Carolina at Greensboro 27412-5001 and L. DuVall, Director, National Ed.D. Program for Education Leaders, NOVA University, 3301 University Avenue, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33314. NCPEA. Los Angeles, 8/90. Originally there were blanks that the authors invited participants to fill in with comments made at the session. The authors have attempted to syntesize the general content of the comments and add the syntheses in the categories (p. 6). We have also borrowed ideas from other sources as cited. Any misquoting or mis-synthesis is the authors', not the generous contributors' from the Interest Group Session on 8/13/90 at NCPEA at California State University, Los Angeles.

Others have decried the weak, if extant, knowledge base in education administration. Achilles (1989a, 1989b, 1989c); Achilles & DuVall (1989); Achilles & Ramey (1990, in press), and many others have summarized the major complaints about the education administration preparation programs and the fact that they are built on a very shaky, jello-like knowledge base. Some examples (cited in Achilles, 1990, pp. 6-7):

> The knowledge base in education and education administration has been cussed, discussed and derided. Demerell (1985) called the absence of a body of its own knowledge "Education's Smoking Gun." The general low estate of eduction departments and faculties on major campuses seems to derive, at least in part, from educators' inability to define their own body of knowledge and specific methods of inquiry (Judge, 1982; Guthrie and Clifford, 1989). Derek Bok, President of Harvard, spoke to education's lack of a knowledge base of its own. To the extent that it is part of education, Bok's (1987) comments include education administration: "Because they have neither a strong profession nor a distinctive body of knowledge to impart, education faculties have no firm anchor for their programs or curricula. Instead, external forces push them first in one direction, and then in another" (p. 46, emphasis added).

Culbertson (1988) hinted at education's lack of a substantive data base in his Cocking lecture. He spoke of education administration's habit of borrowing from others:

> A hundred years after Harris' and Payne's pronouncements the practice of borrowing seems well established. . . . First, borrowed concepts tend to enter textbooks before they are adequately tested in school systems. The result is that such concepts may be used indefinitely in training programs even though their actual relations to school management and leadership practices remain unknown. (pp. 19-20)

Much of what passes for "research" in education administration consists of repeating and reporting what others have said (the current material included!), and not of presenting research results and building these upon important advances in research. A careful check of the citations in articles -- some are scholarly -- often shows that the materials cited are, themselves, not research, but are reports of other's ideas, critiques, syntheses, and informed opinion. The continuous citing of non-research eventually, somehow, leads to the acceptance of the oft-cited piece as "data."

The practice of "borrowing," the absence of a firm data base, problems inherent in preparation programs -- and especially problems in providing strong research emphases -- all seem directly or tangentially related to concerns with research in the field. Inattention to problem-finding (clear definition of problems) remains a major issue connected both to research and preparation (Getzels, 1979). Without clear and important problems carefully defined, education administration research will continue to be "disjointed, theoretically barren, non-cumulative and downright shoddy. . ." (Erickson, 1979; p. 10). Without good research, the field will continue to be inconsequential in improving education.

One error over the past 20 years has been to define the knowledge base as residing in the social sciences. This has led to a pseudo-scientific aura that surrounds course content, research methodology, and academic perspective.

If we aspire to the professional model, then the education administration knowledge base should be at least partly based on practice. (Grounded theory.) We assert:

1. The knowledge base in other professions resides in the practice thereof.

    a. In medicine, the knowledge includes not only pathology, pharmacology, and anatomy, but also the interface between the sciences and the patient.

    b. In architecture, it is built not only on design and engineering, but also the interface of the sciences and the human being.

    c. This "human" and practice condition exists similarly in other professions.

2. Only in "pure sciences" such as theoretical physics, metallurgy, nuclear chemistry, etc. is the human factor secondary. But even here the impact on humans is increasingly important.

A knowledge base for a profession stands on at least two legs. One leg is the basic, theoretical underpinnings that relate concepts and ideas, help predict behaviors, and at least partially explain phenomena.

The other leg is performance and practice. The application of concepts requires the processing of real-time feedback. It requires continuous adjustment, assessment of phenomena, and alteration of courses of action. Performance requires the practitioner to be a "scholar on one's feet." This type of knowledge cannot be acquired in the classroom; it requires a live setting with alive people. It includes a set of skills as well as abstract knowledge. We need to address this with a classic skill-building approach. Note the analogy to the pianist and the piano. One can study music history, style, interpretation, harmony, but until one develops enough skill at the keyboard, the knowledge will not be evident.

In education administration we have emphasized only one leg of the base for too long. We need to develop some skill building as a legitimate ingredient in our programs; we need to strengthen the muscles of the other leg

Where do we start? We start by:

1. Recognizing the legitimacy of both legs of the knowledge base.
2. Reconceptualizing the content of the "theory" leg.
3. Designing ways to develop, value and exercise the "practice" leg.

Building upon a detailed study of the professoriate, Kuh and McCarthy (1989) point out that there is generally malaise and a state of discouragement in the profession regarding the knowledge base. Department Chairs (those who ought to know) and both new and experienced professors of education administration bemoan the absence of a knowledge base. In fact, in their study 12 percent of chairs (n = 203), 15 percent of other faculty (n = 1,099), and 16 percent of experienced faculty (n = 933) view as a critical need an extensive knowledge base in education administration (p. 112). At least a substantial portion of professors in the field don't see much knowledge base when looking directly for one. If they look askance, might they see one?

Some, however, believe that there is at least a modest knowledge base in education administration. [We'd like to seek the collective wisdom of those assembled (Here. At NCPEA. Today!) to start articulating the knowledge base. We'll synthesize the results and add them in categories as a starting point. In suggesting fodder for the knowledge base, let's divide responses into categories, if possible: (1) knowledge that is pure knowledge and/or theory, (2) knowledge that represents "canons of practice," and (3) other. We'll include items upon which we can arrive at reasonable consensus.

Let's use as an example, the following ideas that Dan R Davies suggested to L. DuVall in a personal letter (2/22/90) as part of the knowledge base. Are these theory, canons of practice, or "other." Are they part of the knowledge base? Administrators of educational systems must:

1. know the best of current knowledge from various disciplines about the nature, capacities and operations of learners. (emphasis added)

2. know that learners exist in and interact with a vast complex of forces.

3. visualize an inventory of expectations, goals, and outcomes of the learning experience so they can be selective as to which are feasible, appropriate and possible for the educational system.

4. develop creative approaches to the what-is-to-be-learned so as to balance the opinions of the various "power" groups to maximize benefits to the learner who will be living and performing in the future.

5. be aware of the existence of, and advantages and limitations in the use of, many kinds of learning facilitators.

6. be aware of the various approaches to organization and structure, including the advantages and disadvantages of each.

7. know enough about and be sufficiently skilled in law, finance, problem solving and decision making to be able to perform the executive functions of their positions.

Note that each of these expresses some relationship between/among some knowledge, some person, and some stated or implied outcome. The professional has a person orientation. Here's our chance to define our list! Issues of delivery of the knowledge base are omitted. Purposely omitted (at least verbatim) are such things as the lists of skills and competencies championed by NASSP, AASA, and others, but some elements of these lists may be included separately. We might also surrender and take as the knowledge base those courses required in individual states for initial or advanced certification in education administration positions.

Some Consensual Knowledge-Base Elements (NCPEA, 1990)

A. Pure Knowledge and/or Theory

Planning and Evaluation
Human Growth and Development
Schools and Schooling: Purpose and Roles
Finance, Motiviation Systems
Research/Inquiry Results
Human Relations Skills (Understanding People)
Understanding Organizations

B. Canons of Practice

"Localized" Practice (Engineer and apply ideas from A above)
How to Make Decisions
Problem Solving
"Grounded" Theory, perhaps from "reflecting on practice" and then using sucessful results
Understanding the social construction of knowledge
Demonstration and Application of (A + B + C)

C. Other (or both A + B)

Belief system (Values); Self-understanding
Presupposed Knowledge Base from Teaching
Administration is more process than content
Administering education requires breadth, not a parochial approach
Understanding Modes of Inquiry

What is a Profession?

Education administrators generally believe that they are "professional." What is a profession? Understanding of profession help us target a knowledge base. The authors concede that profession is difficult to define. Operationally, we consider it an applied field built upon a specialized knowledge base and employing a mutually agreed-upon vocabulary to discuss it. The knowledge base derives from accepted methods of inquiry designed to explore and extend the knowledge base. A profession has an accepted way to apply its canons beneficially, and a way to assess the beneficence of that application for its clients. (The concept of its own knowledge base deserves further

study.) The knowledge base may be built either deductively (quantitative research and theory) or inductively (field-based, naturalistic, reflective).

Does medicine have its own knowledge base? What is the knowledge base of medicine, and how does it differ from, say, the knowledge base of pharmacology, anatomy, or of sub-fields of biology? The knowledge base which defines medicine as a profession includes how medical doctors apply (i.e., use the armamentarium at their disposal) the wisdom from medicine's foundational fields to help clients. Typically, professions have a couple other elements that could be considered part of the definition. They have a language which practitioners share and which helps members define clearly elements relative to the practice of the profession. A profession is something provided on demand, with little or no external regulation as to the content or application, although there may be standards (licensing) to be met before a person is eligible to practice the profession. But for purposes of this discussion, the issue of knowledge base is central.

How Do We Build a Knowledge Base?*

Suppose you were set the task of developing a knowledge base for education administration. What would you do? Where would you start? If you were to design an internship, the purpose of which would be to help a neophyte incorporate elements of the knowledge base into the practice of the profession, what would your intern do? How does this translate into ways to prepare professionals for ethical, reflective professional practice? Schon (1983; 1987) tells us that reflective practice is one trait of a true professional.

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*Communication is key to building a knowledge base. How do you know what others are doing? Journals tend to serve a "gatekeeper" role. It doesn't help when many of the journals admit only one type of article or one point of view. This restricts and retards knowledge-base development.

Blumberg (1989) notes that it is easier to think about a profession as a craft (Blumberg uses the metaphor of a potter or sculptor) than as a science or an art (and this from an Art!). Persons in the crafts advance their fields with planned trial and error and informal to formal communication of the results of the trial and error. Often they see in their mind's eye a vision of a completed product and they move to shape it so that the vision becomes a reality.

A common language allows those in the profession to reflect upon what they do and share those reflections. The common language also serves as a mark of membership in the profession and a rite of passage to it.

Knowledge Base Development

The study of practice. In building a knowledge base, it seems unavoidable that we must study exemplary practice (or even not so exemplary practice so that we can identify what hasn't worked). We need to build a lexicon to carry forward our discussion of our practice. Furthermore, as the sage philosopher once said, "Know thyself." We need to go through a period of self-analysis so that we can understand our strengths and weaknesses within the lexicon of our field. If communication is an important element in the knowledge base for administration, we need to analyze our own communication skills; if planning is an important element of our knowledge base, we need to analyze our planning skills. We need a common language to describe and discuss these skills so that our reflection can build a knowledge base from practice. This language will help us understand the application of theoretic concepts in order to explain better the practice and to generalize the practice to similar settings. What would your intern do? Shadow someone? Attend budget meetings? Attend a board meeting?

After a period of self-analysis and the development and use of a common lexicon, an internship might fruitfully be structured around a practical experience which would require the intern to apply those elements of the self-analysis. This active intervention in a problem of practice would be guided and appraised by successful practitioners. Feedback and dialogue would help the person learn to administer schools.

Focused Research. Research provides new information and ideas for the profession to apply. Haller and Knapp (1985) argue that in education administration the research should focus on five "commonplaces" and the interrelations between and among them. The commonplaces (independent variables) are:

Learners
Teachers
Content
Context (Environment)
Administrators

The systematic study of relationships among these five "independent variables" and the effects on clients (outcomes, or dependent variables) of manipulating the variables should be the guiding element of our research focus as we seek to develop a knowledge base. Erickson's (1979) question is important: "What are the determinants and consequences of the various ways of organizing an educational enterprise?" (p. 9). Until we get some agreement on the focus of research in the field, the knowledge base will continue to be diaphanous, at best.

Impediments to Knowledge Base Development

If a knowledge base were easy to develop and if there were no hindrances to its development, a field that has professed to practice as long as education administration has would assuredly have a solid, consensual knowledge base. Unfortunately, evidence points to the contrary about the knowledge base.

Therefore, we should raise questions of impediments to the development of the knowledge base. If science produces a vaccine that will "save" 80% of the population from contracting AIDS, medical science would be acclaimed; doctors would dispense and use this material immediately, not waiting for further tests so they could save lives. Alas, here the metaphor breaks down for education. How many administrators know, as the research clearly shows (e.g., Doyle, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1990), that retaining students in grade not only is bad for the student but assures (virtually) that the student will become a dropout? And yet, how many administrators condone grade retention in their schools? How many administrators allow state policy makers to pass inane rules such as "no pass, no play," a type of regulation designed to drive from the school buildings those very students whom we need to retain in school? Administration cannot be a profession and will not have a knowledge base of repute until administrators apply the knowledge that some of them know and show its positive results.

Furthermore, one need only attend a meeting such as the American Education Research Association (AERA) to see another impediment to knowledge base development. For example, when people begin to explore the effective schools concepts, and show that these concepts seem to help large numbers of pupils, the issue is not to determine why such concepts might work (that would mean applying them and studying them), but rather to engage in pedantic debate about how the various methodologies behind the studies may be weak. Rather than try to see why and how this particular skill might move forward the practice of administration, we castigate those who dared test a new idea. We argue that their work was "non-scientific," or even worse, "not scientific." Meantime, the idea still works. However, we have eschewed it as part of our legitimate

knowledge base. (We are dismayed to say we still find students going through programs of education administration who have not even been introduced to concepts of the effective schools movement.)

Other impediments are the professors themselves who know only one type of research (e.g., survey or "perceptions" studies) and only let their students do this type of study. Or professors who know only one type of preparation model and will not consider others--in spite of new research on learning, etc. These neanderthals frozen in time might benefit from new ideas!

Prestine and LeGrand (1990) suggest that "new perspectives from cognitive psychology on learning theory hold important implications for all concerned with the preparation of educational administrators" (p. 1). They call for a "contextualized view of the thinking and learning process" and contend that "knowledge is created and made meaningful by the context and activities through which it is acquired" (p. 1). This is called "situated knowledge or situated cognition" (p. 1). They suggest that those responsible for preparation programs should seek new methods and models based upon adult learning and experiences of students in these programs. "By suggesting new . . . linkages between how we prepare educational administrators and the reality of the practitioners' world, the problems of preparation programs are reframed . . . in terms of the situational and contextual nature of knowledge acquisition and use" (pp. 3-4). Professors need to work with students to study problems of practice and then to use students' knowledge of education in preparation. (We do recognize "presumptive" knowledge. We presume that to get teaching credentials those in our programs know learning theory or pedagogy or child development, so we do not teach these.) Prestine and LeGrand note:

> Students do not enter educational administration programs as empty vessels but as practitioners often with extensive experience and

> knowledge of the educational system. Academic knowledge can generate new connections and give new meanings that reshape practice, but this knowledge must be integrated into the practitioners' everyday knowledge systems. (p. 1)

Prestine and LeGrand offer a proposal for improving preparation programs based upon situated cognition and cognitive apprenticeship ideas. "Using the concepts of cognitive apprenticeship, educational administration classes focus on the 'processes that experts use to handle complex tasks' . . . in other words, the processes educational administrators use in actual practice to solve real-life problems (p. 19, emphasis added). Alas, this begs for what we don't have--that leg of a knowledge base built from expert practice ("Grounded theory"?). Here, then, is one place to start in developing our knowledge base. It will be messy. Professors will need to get into schools. In groups and with students. Fairly often. It is so much easier and non-threatening (you don't expose your ignorance of expert practice) to have a student design a questionnaire whose results won't add to a knowledge base. The Prestine and LeGrand paper offers real challenges . . .

To make a bad situation worse, that leg of the knowledge base built on traditional research and theory (deduction) does not get rave reviews (e.g., Bridges, 1982; Erickson, 1979). It's follow the leader (Boyan, 1981) and "the habit of borrowing" (Culbertson, 1988) and other messy ideas. Present "research" is mostly of little value in developing a knowledge base.

Conclusion

Many of us have decried the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and its new unit rule. Perhaps it's good that this happened. This procedure has asked us to define our knowledge base and justify what we teach built upon a knowledge base. (Another way, of course, is to write creative fiction, or . . . .) The closer we look, the dimmer the knowledge base glows. Should we look askance?

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